

# THE SUFFERINGS

AND THE

# PRAISES OF CHRIST.

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PSALM xxii.

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**T**HE result of the truth taught in this psalm is that they shall praise the Lord that seek Him. It is the fruit of unmingled grace, brought out in a very remarkable manner, and quite different from a hope or a promise. Assuredly that the Holy One should be forsaken of God is not promise, and that is the ground laid here for praise.

In Psalm xix. we have the testimony of creation and of the law. It is a solemn thought that whatever man has touched he has corrupted. Creation groans when a man has been there. But if I look where man cannot reach, at the moon, the stars, &c., all is glorious. The "heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work." Next (verse 7. and seq.) "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." Here the point is not whether man can keep it or not, but its intrinsic perfection and its value for those who by grace profit by its light. Neither of these witnesses can be changed. Man early

filled the earth with corruption and violence. "And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; and God said, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them." The heavens spread over all, and the sun going about in unwearied circuit from one end to the other, are the bright unchanging witnesses, above man's defiling hand, of the divine glory. As little does the law of Jehovah vary; but if man cannot change the law, he disobeys it. The effect of law is to claim from a sinful man that he should not be sinful.

Mark, in passing, the order of God's dealings. When sin came in, God said that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. This is not promise to Adam, but the judgment pronounced on Satan: if a promise, it is one to the second Adam. Then comes a word of positive promise to Abram, the father of the faithful: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Afterwards, when the offering had taken place on Moriah, the promises were made, unconditionally as before, to his seed. But the question of righteousness must be raised, because God is the righteous God. Blessing under law depended on man's faithfulness as well as God's. At Sinai, it was said, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." The law raised the question of righteousness and put man under obedience, instead of his taking his place as a sinner. "All the people

answered together and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." That was law, and Israel under it; but "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Long afterwards rises another witness—One who testified to the moral nature of God as well as His power—One who manifested the righteousness of God, instead of merely claiming that of man—One who came, as it were, with all promises in Himself, if He had been received

And how was Christ received? He was entirely rejected. In Psalm xx. Messiah is viewed in the day of trouble. So the Jews will see in their latter-day trouble, identifying Jesus as their Saviour. Psalm xxi. is the answer to their godly desire touching the Anointed of Jehovah, and the expression of their joy at His exaltation as King. He has been heard, and has His heart's desire given Him.

In Psalm xxii. we have a totally different thing. It is Christ forsaken of God. Not that He is not despised of the people there: strong bulls of Bashan beset Him round, dogs compassed Him, the assembly of the wicked inclosed Him; but all this, felt as none but Christ could feel, what was it in presence of the awful reality of Christ suffering from the hand of God—of Christ suffering for sin? It is a sad but useful picture, the side of man; for it is all the same nature—such were we; but turn it round, and what is the other side? Christ has brought out what God is, and that is love, even when it is a question of our sins.

What is man? What was Pilate? An unjust judge, who washed his hands, while he condemned to death the One whom he had thrice proclaimed to be guiltless; and this at the instigation—at the intercession!—of the chief priests and the rulers of God's people. And the disciples, what and where were they? "They all forsook him and fled." "And Peter followed him afar off." When he comes into the palace, he curses and swears, and denies Jesus again and again. Take man where you will, and if Christ be there, everything is put to the test: only sin comes out. His cross, His death revealed the real character of all: the history of man, morally, is closed. "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Man has been weighed and found wanting in every way. "The flesh profiteth nothing:" it breaks law and abuses grace. The end of all I am as man I read in the cross. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." For there is another thing altogether there. On the cross hung the One spotless blessed man, yet forsaken of God. What a fact before the world! No wonder the sun was darkened—the central and splendid witness to God's glory in nature—when the Faithful and True Witness cried to His God and was not heard.

Forsaken of God! what does this mean? What has man to do with it? What part have I in the cross? One single part—my sins. Here then is One forsaken of God, and saying it aloud before all men. There is

none to see and sympathize, as in Psalm xx. The women who followed from Galilee were there afar off, but they understood not. It baffles thought—that most solemn lonely hour, which stands aloof from all before and after. How does not the perfectness of Christ shine in it! “The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth;” yet was his spirit provoked, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job;” yet he opened his mouth to curse his day, and murmured that the Preserver of man had set him as a mark, so that he was a burden to himself. In Christ nothing was brought out but what was perfect.

But if I have to say to Christ, in what only is it first of all? What do I bring to the cross? What have I in it? My sins. There is not a vanity we have not preferred to Him. What a humbling thought for us—for me! The Righteous One is suffering for sin, and vindicates God (though to Himself the depth of agony), who deserted Him when most needed, we may say, by Him. “But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm,” &c. It was obedience—suffering—to the uttermost; but forsaken as He was, Christ says, His God was holy all the same. We know now why it was. It was for sin—for our evil; for righteousness we had none. Our sins

were our only contribution. What a tale that tells on our part!—on His, O what blessed love!

The wonderful truth is that the Son of God came into the world, and in the cross God made Him sin who knew no sin. The sinless Saviour drank the cup of wrath. It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him—to make His soul an offering for sin. Then and there He bore our iniquities. What is the consequence? He died under the burden of sin; and what becomes of it? It is clean gone; not that it was glossed over, but put away by the sacrifice of Himself.

Thus, before the day of judgment, sin has been thoroughly dealt with by God in the cross of Christ. There will be a day of judgment, and those who believe not will find everlasting condemnation then. But for those who believe there has been already judgment in Christ. God must judge sinners; but were this all, where would be His love?—if He overlooked sin, where His holiness? It would not be love, but indifference to evil. When I see the cross, I see the perfect desert of sin, and this not in the destruction of the sinner, but in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, suffering once the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to the God who was glorified in the sins being thus completely blotted out. Christ took sin in His own body on the tree, laid down the life in which He bore it, and rose absolutely without it. Now then the question of righteousness is not raised only but settled. Neither is it any longer a promise, but a work done.

There are promises for the believer to enjoy in their season ; but the suffering on the cross is ended and past. Redemption is neither creation, nor law, nor promises, but a divine work wrought about sin, and already accomplished in Christ through His blood—in Christ now accepted of God and glorified at His right hand.

Hence, if sin was judgment to Christ, it results in nothing but grace to us in and through Him. For if God takes up sin in my case at the day of judgment, I am lost. But I say, He has taken it up in Christ, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities ; and now there flows a stream of unmingled grace. For it is not only that the unsparing wrath of God fell on Christ crucified, but that Christ enters into all the delight of God after putting away sin. God was now no longer a judge and an avenger, but a Deliverer from death and all the consequences of the sin Christ had taken on Himself ; His glory as God and as Father was concerned in raising Christ from the dead, and setting Him in righteous glory as man and in infinite delight as Son before Him.

What a change there is now ! Christ is heard from the thorns of the unicorns. Resurrection is the answer of His God and Father. But, mark, Christ has people whom He calls His brethren, and to them He must go and tell it all. God has righteously and in perfect love brought Him back from the grave ; and now says the Lord, "I will declare thy name to my brethren ; in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise to thee."

Never had the divine complacency in Christ been so complete as on the cross, never was God so glorified as in Him there; but there was not, nor could be, the enjoyment of communion in that awful hour, when sin was judged as it never will be again. But now sin-bearing was over, and God so perfectly justified and glorified in it that it became a question of Christ's bringing others into the place of holy joy and peace and His own relationship to His God and Father.

Mary Magdalene wept at the grave, for she loved the Lord and knew not salvation in Him risen. "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." To her apprehensions, if He were gone, all was lost. But Jesus made Himself known to her in resurrection, and says, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." For whom was the work done but for them? But more than this: God was His Father, He was theirs; if His God, He was theirs also. He brings the disciples into the same place He has entered Himself.

If you love your children thoroughly, you desire them to have the same place as yourself. It was so with Christ. He could suffer alone, but this finished, could He praise alone? No: "in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise to thee." All the suffering and sorrow were His; His joy He would share with those He loved. He Himself leads their praises.



He is come out from unutterable unfathomable agony and shame, and does He keep silence? Does not His tone of praise well assort with the darkness He was in? Does not fulness of joy now answer to God's forsaking Him then for our sin? (Compare verses 24, 25.) He had been in the depths for us, but now He is out and praising; and how should we praise? With Him in the certainty of what He has wrought. God would have us free before Him in joy by virtue of what Christ has done; He would have us judging every evil, for it is a holy place, but the place He is in is the result of His work, and He gives it—nothing less than it—to us. Could I go into the presence of God in my sins? I should flee from Him like Adam. But, believing in Christ, I am in God's presence, because He has brought me there.

Are you then seeking God? Have you heard the voice of Christ? It is no longer the cry of deepest grief unheard. The atonement is made; He Himself is raised from the dead, the accepted glorified Saviour; and what to Him the change from the affliction of the afflicted to His joy as risen! He gathers around Him those who receive Him, and in their midst sings praises to God. If you seek God now, you are entitled by His work to take up and join in His song of praise. For it is not a promise, but an accomplished fact. Do I believe in Christ? If so, I am before the throne of God (in title, not in fact, of course) by virtue of the cross; I am, inside the veil, and my sins are left for ever behind me

From verse 22 we find nothing but grace. Do you who seek God say, O that I could find him? But He has found you. Come then and praise Him. Christ has been on the cross, bearing our sins. You have to learn it as an accomplished fact; not to say, I hope He will do it. The work is done, sin is entirely put away, and Christ is the leader of praise according to His estimate of sin, of wrath due to it borne in grace, and of the perfect deliverance displayed in His own resurrection. Thenceforward is heard praise, and praise only. First, Christ in the midst of the congregation praises God, and those that fear Jehovah are called to praise Him (verses 22, 23). Then His praise is anticipated "in the great congregation," and "they shall praise Jehovah that seek him, and all the ends of the world are to remember and turn to him" (verses 25, 27). In the millennial earth the homage will be universal: "all they that be fat upon earth"—"all they that go down to the dust;" yea, and not that race then alive only, for they "shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this."

In the light there are exercises of conscience, but how do I get there? Because Christ put away sin, and I receive Him. True, we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; but it is the judgment-seat of Him who loved me and gave Himself for me, who saved me, and in whom I am accepted. If Christ had to do with a Pharisee, He soon unmasked him; but to one who came to Him as a poor sinner He was always

grace, as to the woman in Luke vii. Never did He deal roughly with one soul who came in the truth of its condition: to such He spoke, and wrought in the truth of His own grace. That sinful woman was attracted by divine love in Christ, and hears Him pronounce her many sins forgiven. She knew His great love, and loved much. When He comes to this, He does not trouble Himself more about the Pharisee, but says to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." And no wonder; for it is the selfsame thing which brightens heaven that made her heart bright.

We must then be all manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, before the person who by His death put away all my sins. What a blessing to find Him on the judgment-seat! There is nothing in this to disturb the peace He has made by the blood of His cross, and peace we must have in order to enjoy communion with God. Can two walk together, except they are agreed? Then think how it is we get there. Christ will come and receive me to Himself, because He loves me and wants me to be with Him where He is; and how do I arrive? Glorified in a body like His own. Do you ask, How can people speak thus? I answer by the question, How can you be in heaven in any other way? He who of God is made unto us righteousness is the judge. To believe in His name and yet doubt that we have peace is calling in question the value of His work. He who suffered and is now glorified will not gainsay it when He judges. But

there will be nothing secret: all will come to light. What a lesson for us when in glory!—and what is the effect? I look on my past life, and what have I been? I look since I have been a Christian, and what feebleness, what failure! But am I therefore to be afraid? No: I look at God and say, What a God I have had to do with! Every step is a manifestation of my Father's love, who had led me along the way. In glory I shall see all my foolishness, but it will be in the body risen or changed. I shall learn the love of Christ in every tittle of my life from beginning to end.

Are your voices tuned to praise with Christ? He is gone from the wrath and darkness of the cross into the light and love of His Father's presence, and is praising. Can you praise with Him? There all trembling disappears. Do you believe "He hath done this?" Oh, beloved, how those who seek Him lag behind His heart! What is it you believe? and in whom? Do you not know that He drank the cup to the dregs? and is all uncertain to you still? If you think of what you are, I say you are a thousand miles off what you ought to be. If you seek Him, His word warrants that you should praise Him. He is in the presence of God as the consequence of His work. May your hearts set to their seal that God is true! As a Father, He may chasten, but the chastenings are a Father's ways with children's hearts. May you not reject the testimony of Jesus that He has spent His life, having suffered once the just for the unjust, that your souls may have present peace with God! "He hath done this."

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